

Romanesque Art

New presentation



The remodelling of the MNAC's Romanesque Art Collection, undertaken thanks to sponsorship from FUNDACIÓN MAPFRE, is intended to update the museographic discourse on the basis of a rationalisation of the order and choice of works and of aspects to do with their presentation and conservation. The new proposal is the result of a long process and has involved an intense job of transversal and interdisciplinary research and reflection by the Department of Restoration and Preventive Conservation as well as the Department of Romanesque Art.

This remodelling, which does not affect architectural aspects, has allowed important improvements to the installations, especially as regards the lighting of the works, the preventive conservation systems, maintenance and energy efficiency. All the work done has been aimed, first of all, at achieving the best possible conditions for the conservation of the works of art, and, secondly, at providing the visitor with the most suitable conditions in which to appreciate their aesthetic, historical and cultural values.

The MNAC's Romanesque Art: new presentation

The MNAC's Romanesque Art Collection consists of works from the 11th, 12th and 13th centuries, of which the most prominent is the exceptional series of mural paintings, the only one of its kind in the world. These paintings are largely from Romanesque churches in the Pyrenees and most of them were purchased and moved to the Museum between 1919 and 1923 to avoid their leaving the country. The exhibition is completed with a rich collection of panel paintings, the largest and oldest series from Romanesque Europe, wood carvings, stone sculpture and metal work.

In order to rationalise the discourse and avoid repetition, the works have been extensively rearranged and the selection of work on show has been reduced, except for the large series of mural paintings and their support structures, whose arrangement has not been altered. These series establish the chronological and stylistic discourse, into which are inserted the rooms devoted to different types and techniques: panel paintings, sculptures in wood, sculptures in stone and metal work.

The genesis of the collection and the technique for removing the mural paintings

The new presentation also includes elements that describe how the collection was formed and the technique by which the mural paintings were removed, along with a documentary video showing some of the paintings in the church of Sant Joan de Boí being removed by Museum staff in 1978 using the *strappo* technique. The procedure is very similar to the one used by the team of Italian specialists in charge of the large scale campaign of removals between 1919 and 1923, except for the new support for the paintings, which is made using materials that didn't exist in those days.

The most valuable collection of Romanesque mural painting in the world: novelties in the treatment of colour, lacunae and lighting

As regards the collection of mural painting, the most valuable and unique kept in any museum in the world, the work undertaken has centred very specifically on the lighting and, in some rooms, on the treatment of the supporting walls, to favour the contemplation of important series like those from Sant Climent de Taüll, Santa Maria de Taüll, Sant Joan de Boí, Sant Quirze de Pedret, Sorpe, Cardona and Sigena. In general, the object has been to present things more clearly to the observer, for which reason some fragments have been moved.



Detail of the apse of Sant Quirze de Pedret

Another important innovation arising from this process is the application of a new criterion for treating the lacunae, the parts where paint has been lost. These lacunae have been filled in with a paste made with sand from the same area as the painting being treated, the same practice applied in Sant Joan de Boí and Sant Quirze de Pedret.

Panel paintings: the largest and oldest series from Romanesque Europe, easier viewing for the public

The MNAC's collection of Romanesque panel painting is one of the most important in the world and a beautiful testimony to the importance of polychrome furnishing production in medieval Catalonia. The most significant works are altar frontals, sometimes complete with side panels, as well as altar canopies and beams.

The way these items are exhibited, especially the altar frontals and the canopy panels, at a height much closer to the spectator's eye so as to give a direct view, is another of the novelties of the remodelling.

Wooden and stone sculptures: new plinths, anchoring systems and showcases

The MNAC's collection of wooden sculptures is also very important, not just on account of its typological variety (Crucifixes, Madonnas, Descents from the Cross), but because some of the pieces it contains are fundamental works of European Romanesque art, as in the case of the *Batló Majesty*.

The way these items are presented, the plinths, the anchoring and the glass showcases have been replaced so as to bring the works closer to the public, enhance their three-dimensional aspect and facilitate the work of conservation and cleaning. Another important point is the new location and presentation of the carvings of the Descent from the Cross, which are now exhibited in the same room as the paintings from Sorpe.



The mural paintings from Sorpe and the Descent from the Cross from Santa Maria de Taüll

Monumental sculpture applied to architecture is present in the MNAC's collections in the form of a series of capitals mainly from cloisters and portals in Catalan buildings. The new presentation includes the base of the *Ripoll Canopy*, a highly representative work from one of the most important Romanesque workshops, on permanent loan from the Bishopric of Vic.

The new presentation also provides a chance to take in a 3-D reproduction of the Ripoll portal, the most monumental sculptural work of Catalan Romanesque. This project by the

Polytechnic University of Catalonia was shown at the exhibition *Romanesque Art and the Mediterranean*, organised by the MNAC in 2008.

Romanesque treasure: precious metals and enamels

The visit ends with the items of metalwork, which were the treasures of the medieval churches. These objects had a liturgical function, but at the same time they made up the churches' material heritage, a way of accumulating wealth.

The showcases contain a selection of pieces from different periods from the Museum's collection of metalwork. Two are devoted to what is called Limoges work, the famed production of enamelled copper objects centred in this northern Occitanian city.

Preventive restoration and conservation campaign: a new criterion for filling in lacunae

The work by the MNAC's Department of Restoration and Preventive Conservation on a fragment of one of the collection's most emblematic mural paintings, *The Stoning of Saint Stephen*, from Sant Joan de Boí, has served to establish a new criterion for filling in the lacunae in mural paintings. After some months of observation, analyses were carried out to diagnose the state of conservation of the supporting adhesive and steps were taken to consolidate the painting. The surface was cleaned and after removing the successive layers of colour that covered the lacunae a new proposal was made for restoring the colour by recreating the original lime and sand mortar on the basis of a study of the mortar, of the colour of the sand according to its origin and of its grain size. This approach has been applied in the fragments and in the apses selected for working on.

The closure of the Romanesque Art room has allowed certain specific jobs of conservation/restoration to be undertaken that were hardly compatible with opening the collection to the public. By way of example, it has been possible to reintegrate certain fragments of mural painting that had been left out of place in 1995. This is the case of the angels in the side apse of Sant Climent de Taüll, which for the time being had been transferred to a flat support and exhibited outside the apse and which have now been added to the rest of the work. Thanks to the various technical, historical, artistic and documentary studies made in recent years, it has also been possible to put the fragments from Sant Joan de Boí back in their rightful place and to correct the position of some of the fragments of the paintings in the apse of the Gospel of Sant Quirze de Pedret. Taking

advantage of the occasion, they have been cleaned and the new criterion for filling in the lacunae has been applied.

During the remodelling of the Romanesque Art Collection, the work of the Department of Restoration and Preventive Conservation has consisted mainly in monitoring the state of conservation and advising in the design of the new showcases, the lighting and the supports and anchorage. The aim has at all times been to extend the life of the works and guarantee their conservation, as well as their safety and maintenance and access for inspection.

Improvements in the maintenance of the installations and in preventive conservation

Sustainability has been a prime objective in the approach to work relating to the maintenance of the installations, the lighting and preventive conservation in remodelling the Romanesque Art room. High-performance halogen lamp spotlights have been installed to light the exhibits. These spotlights are fitted with presence detectors, which, outside of visiting hours, activate the essential lighting needed for surveillance or cleaning operations, so as to guarantee minimum energy consumption and avoid shining light directly onto the works of art. These two measures reduce the effects of the radiation on the works of art and allow considerable saving in energy.

To light the interior of the apses from the base and to light the walkways, variable intensity LED spotlights have been installed. This technology has been chosen both for reasons of energy and to avoid changes of temperature inside the apse. The emergency lighting installation conforms to regulations currently in force.

The divisions between sections have been used to conceal the installations and have been covered to improve the performance of the air conditioning and prevent dirt accumulating. In addition, the number of inspection hatches has been increased.

Other measures include the installation of computer network connections and equipment for reaching raised and hard to reach areas.

Activities

This autumn, the MNAC and the Friends of the MNAC are organising a round table and a series of talks to be held in the Museum's auditorium and in the Romanesque Art rooms. At

these events, various of the MNAC's specialists and other guest speakers will talk about the remodelling project, as well as some of the most important works and the main aspects of the collection.

Education

The remodelling of the Romanesque Art rooms has meant updating some of the educational activities which the MNAC will once again be providing for schoolchildren and families in the autumn after these months of closure. October will also see the start of a new ***MNAC Enigma*** based on this collection.

Exhibition details

Romanesque

New presentation



Area remodelled: 2,803 m²

Area of the Romanesque Art Collection: 2,803 m²

Number of works exhibited: 145

Direct lighting: 324 halogen lamp spotlights and 300 LED spotlights

Surveillance/cleaning lighting: 35 LED spotlights

Energy saving

Previous consumption: 125,382.00 KWh per year

Present consumption: 45,658.00 KWh per year

Annual energy saving: 79,724.00 KWh

MNAC Press Office

Tel. 936 220 360 (ext.1016/1017)

premsa@mnac.cat